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Sunday April 8, 2007

Boyle Farmers Markets merge, move to Constitution Square

By ANN R. HARNEY
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The two farmers markets here have united for what the sponsors hope will be one new, improved, regional and more visible farmers market, better for producers and consumers.

A letter went out late Friday to 900 farm families in Boyle County announcing the plan that combines the Danville-Boyle County Chamber of Commerce market and the market sponsored by the Heart of Danville into an official Boyle County Farmers Market.

The two entities have joined forces with the Boyle County Extension Office, whose

personnel mailed the letters and reply cards last week. Next to the unity of the three organizations, the most exciting element may be that the market will be held at Constitution Square, a more visible location than either of the places where the earlier markets set up shop.

Located on Main Street, the square attracts tourists in the summer, bringing more people to the market than just local shoppers.

Ron Jackson, chairman of the Chamber's agriculture committee, said people in various elements of agriculture were consulted and it was unanimous: The best way to help farmers and consumers is a farmers market.

The Constitution Square location offers amenities not available to producers at the previous markets. They include clean bathrooms, running water and electricity.

"I'm really excited about it," said Amy Matthews, co-chairperson of the agriculture committee and a producer of eggs and turkeys on her Cackling Knobs Farm on Lebanon Road.

Matthews said she will be able to sell fresh eggs at the market with the availability of electricity.

Earlier features remain

She didn't feel confident enough that a cooler would keep the eggs at the necessary constant temperature. Now the investment in a small refrigerator seems worthwhile.

Her caterer's license also will allow her to cook a pasture turkey at home and take it to the market so people can taste it and sign up for a processed turkey ready for Thanksgiving. "This is really my first year to be able to sell at the farmers market," she said. And she's not just excited about her ability to sell the produce from her farm. "I'm excited about the shopping opportunities."

Some vestiges of the earlier markets remain.

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The days and times are similar, as are the events they surround. On Tuesdays and Saturdays, the market will be open from 8 a.m. until noon or until all of the goods are sold. The Heart of Danville's Thursday evening hours, 5-8 p.m. coincided with the Whimsy in Weisiger live concerts.

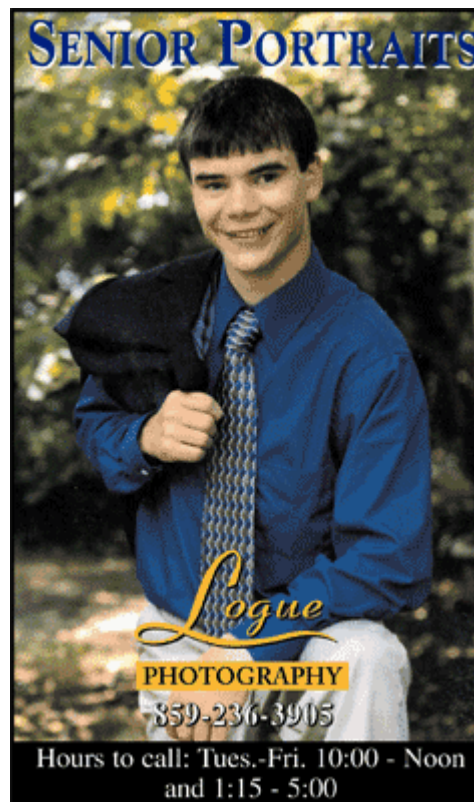
They still do, but the concerts are going to be moved from the grounds at the Boyle County Courthouse to Constitution Square. Jackson said sponsors are working to get a stage built for the square. The market will be open at its usual time, but at Constitution Square.

Producers will have two methods to display and sell their wares. Those wishing to sell from tables will have 10-foot-by-10-foot spaces on the Main Street side of the park. Those wishing to sell from their trucks may back them over the sidewalk and sell from their tailgates, also on the Main Street side of the park at street level, the letter to farm families says.

Included with the letter is a card producers can use to reserve a place in the market. It will cost each producer \$50 for the year and the best spots at the market will go first. Those who want to get those best spots are encouraged to send their cards and money as soon as possible. The deadline is May 10.

The combined market will welcome Boyle County producers and producers from area counties in an effort to make it truly a regional market. "There is no reason our market can't rival the big ones in Lexington and Louisville if we can obtain enough participation," the letter to Boyle farm families says.

Area producers will have a designated place to set up shop and signage



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identifying sellers from Boyle County and those from out of the county. Jerry Little, the agriculture extension agent in Boyle County, said his office has become the central office for producers to let sponsors know about their participation in the market. The cards are to be returned to his office.

"I'm contacting agents in surrounding counties," he said.

Market sponsors are seeking state and federal grants, and Jackson said with added funds, more amenities will be available to producers, including decorative bins and tables. Until then, vendors will continue to provide their own tables as they have done in the past, he said.

Another advantage of having the market on Main Street is its availability to those who don't have a grocery within walking distance and can't travel to the stores on the outskirts of the city, Jackson said. And there will be plenty of room for parking, both on Main, Walnut and Second streets, totaling 45-50 places, Jackson said.

"The thing I want people to realize is this is a total community effort," he said.

"There have been no disagreements, no turf battles."

Market hours:

On Tuesdays and Saturdays, the market will be open from 8 a.m. until noon or until all of the goods are sold. Thursday evening hours will be 5-8 p.m. and feature live musical performances.

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